

The University of Chicago

A STUDY OF THE
LITERARY STYLE OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT IN THE KING
JAMES VERSION

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

MARCH, 1941

By
JOSEPH LUDWIG MIHELIC

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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Summary and Conclusion

Summary

The chief aim of this dissertation was, first, to correct some of the common misconceptions regarding the qualifications of the King James translators; and second, to investigate the source of the superb literary style of the Old Testament of the King James Version.

To achieve this purpose this study was divided into four parts:

1. A brief historical development of the versions preceding the King James Bible was sketched and their relationship to the Royal Version noted.

2. In this part the development of Hebraic studies in the English universities was traced, with a view of determining the extent of, and the interest in, the study of Oriental tongues in England in the period in which the King James Bible was translated. This investigation revealed that, prior to the Reformation the learning of Oriental languages was desultory and restricted to a few scholars, but with the coming of the Reformation the interest became so great that the teaching of Hebrew was introduced even into the grammar schools, and that by 1540 the endowed regius professorships of Hebrew were established in the two leading English universities, Oxford and Cambridge. Thus, the men who were chosen to translate the Bible in 1604 were scholars who grew up and received their scholarly training in a period in which the Oriental languages were studied most intensely. Moreover, from an examination of the contemporary reports, it became

evident that these men were some of the outstanding Hebraists of their time, and that not a few of them held important positions in educational and ecclesiastical institutions.

3. Having established the educational and linguistic qualifications of the translators, attention was then directed to an examination of the translation itself. This phase of study was pursued by giving first of all a brief history of the development of the English language, and the part that the Bible played in this development. Then was made a detailed analysis of the five elements that compose the biblical language, namely: the vocabulary, the grammatical constructions, the rhythm, the figures of speech, and the Hebraisms. Each of these elements disclosed some distinct characteristic of the biblical style. Thus, (a) the vocabulary revealed that there is a predominance of Anglo-Saxon terminology; (b) in the word sequence and phraseology the Hebrew division of thought has been followed very closely; (c) the rhythmic beauty of the language is the result of the translators' faithful adherence to the Hebrew original; (d) the figures of speech are Hebraic; and (e) the language abounds in Hebraisms which are the result of a literal translation of the original.

4. This study has also revealed that in the development of the various translations of the Scriptures, there is perceptible no influence of the contemporary literature on the biblical style. Rather, the influence of the biblical style is observed in the secular literature.

Conclusions

From the above summary of this study the following conclusions have been reached:

1. It has been established, beyond any doubt, that the translators of the Royal Version were very capable men as trans-

lators. This fact is observed not only from the extant records of their educational training and linguistic ability, but also from the result of their labors, which shall continue to bear witness to their collective talent and ability as long as the English Bible is read.

2. On the basis of the study of the literary style and the various stylistic characteristics it follows that the King James Bible is a translation into English vocabulary rather than into English phraseology. The vocabulary is English, while the phraseology follows the Hebrew thought pattern. The style of the King James Version is, therefore, a Hebraic literary style clothed in English vocabulary.

